

Savagery

A RPG of Life, Love, and Strife

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What's the Best Way to Hurt You?

RPGs and Violence

If you haven't encountered a Roleplaying Game (RPG) then a quick summary is that you work with other players, acting out characters of your own design to enjoy a fictional world of someone else's design. The rules of the game are there to help guide you in having fun. But the important part is that you focus on making sure you're not the only one enjoying themselves. And of course one of the most common ways to have fun in an RPG is to get into a fight. Not a real fight, an imaginary fight, since they're easier to get into and less trouble if you lose.

Now if you know all about RPGs then this shouldn't be any news to you. Especially the fact that most RPGs lean towards combat as the major form of excitement. This is the "violence inherent in the system". Now you can debate all you want on the subject, but violence pretty much seems here to stay. And this game isn't trying to change that.

But at the same time, Savagery doesn't have physical violence in any real way. Because more common than physical violence is the violence of words, of emotions, and of beliefs. That is big piece of human savagery and that is the point of this game. So consider yourself warned, this isn't just a game about hurting people, it's a game where the wounds don't ever really go away.

As an aside, the photographs you see in this game are all from the morgue file: <http://www.morguefile.com/>, a wonderful source for public domain photographs.

Joining the Club

The characters in *Savagery* are pretty much normal people. They love, they argue, they get frustrated, and they do stupid things. They are much like you and I. What makes them stand out is that each of them has found their way into the same little club. It doesn't even matter what that club might be. It could be a sewing bee, a veterans support group, or a model railroad club. All that really matters is that the characters find themselves together, and that somehow they have each arrived at the conclusion that it is time for a change.

Because of this shared background the first things to decide when preparing to play *Savagery* is what is the club, and what kind of change is in store. The choice of club should be decided by the players, if necessary by a vote. It is then each player's responsibility to make sure that their character would reasonably attend the club. The choice of what sort of changes will occur is more confined: the characters could be improving themselves; the characters could be simply seeking change; or the characters could be on the road to self-destruction. This choice, between the upward spiral, the horizontal change, or the downward spiral should be made prior to the game. Unlike the choice of club, this choice will directly influence the mechanics of the game. And remember once you make this decision, it's pretty much fixed there for the rest of the game.

Scene after Scene

Unlike many RPGs, *Savagery* has a basic structure to the different scenes occurring within a session. Broadly speaking *Savagery* has two types of scenes: Club scenes and Trigger scenes. Sessions begin and end with club scenes, with the intermediate scenes alternating between trigger and club.

A club scene occurs during a meeting of the club members. Often this scene is meant to discuss each of the character's current situation. Sometimes emotional conflicts will occur during a club scene. This only occurs if the two players involved agree to participate in a sparring version of emotional combat. These combats serve as practice for the real ones occurring in the trigger scenes.

Trigger scenes are based around one character, triggered by one of his or her drives. In this scene, the character is faced with an emotional combat hinging on the triggered drive. Failure here means a loss of that drive, success could mean strengthening, or in the least staying afloat for another day. Only the focal character is present, but the remaining characters may give advice and use certain abilities to aid the combatant. In essence this is a manifestation of their advice and support. Trigger scenes are where things can become resolved, and changes can actually happen. They are also where characters are in the greatest risk of permanent damage and defeat.

Everything Else

Since both club and trigger scenes focus on emotional combat, there doesn't seem to be much room in *Savagery* for anything else. And this is precisely correct. *Savagery* is a game about emotional conflict and the violence inflicted in them. Writing reports, driving cars, and beating people with baseball bats are largely unimportant activities.

But sometimes these things matter anyway. In that case just do the simple thing. The most likely outcome will happen. The rough and tumble bar brawler will mop the floor with the puny paper pusher. The better driver will win the race. And so on. If things are too even to tell then just decide randomly. Whatever you do, get it over quickly. That way you can get back to the fun.

Finding Who You Are

When creating a character in Savagery you should have already decided on the basics of the club, and the type of game (upward spiral, horizontal change, or downward spiral). Only when you've finished those steps, should you start making a character. That way you can make sure your character fits the club and the game style.

The first step in creating a character is to give a basic description. This is done by writing three sentences, one about your character's past, one about his or her present circumstances, and one about his or her dreams for the future. Then come up with a name. This description will give you a basis for later parts of creating your character, especially drives and fighting styles.



Windows to the Psyche

The second step is determining your starting Psyche ratings. There are five ratings for the Psyche:

- **Ego** - sense of self and self-worth.
- **Empathy** - ability to connect with others.
- **Ideals** - expectations of self.
- **Libido** - passion and desire.
- **Reason** - rationality and grounding in reality.

Allocate the values 4, 3, 3, 2, and 2 among those five ratings, filling in the circles.

The third step is to determine your character's drives. Drives are the focus of Savagery, because they cause the trigger scenes to occur. You start with 3 drives, one at 5, one at 3, and one at 1. Each drive is unique to your character. It could be *Become an Artist*, *Sleep Around*, or *Keep My Job*, but it should always relate to your character's past, present, or future.

For each drive you must also list two to five people in your character's life who relate to this drive - these will be people who will be opposing your character in trigger scenes. Also, each drive has room for up to five topics, these are obstacles or goals within the drive which your character will argue about during those trigger scenes, each topic has a specific effect on your actions.

1. Basic Description

- (a) Write Past, Present, and Future
- (b) Choose a Name

2. Assign the values 4, 3, 3, 2, and 2, one each to a Psyche rating

3. Assign the values 5, 3, and 1, one each to a Drive rating

- (a) Name each Drive
- (b) List 2-4 people related to the drive
- (c) List 2-3 issues or details related to the drive

4. Pick two Fighting Styles

The last step of creating a Savagery character is to select your fighting styles. These will determine what maneuvers you have and how well they work. Also fighting styles each have a way to influence other character's trigger scenes. Choose two fighting styles. A list of fighting styles can be found in the next chapter.

Laying Down the Hurting

Savagery is a Roleplaying Game of emotional combat. Players will spend almost as much of their time involved with emotional combat as they do portraying their characters. For this reason, Savagery uses an unconventional approach to dice rolling. Don't be alarmed, you'll get the hang of it quickly.

The Roll

Savagery uses only two dice types: six-sided dice (d6) and eight-sided dice (d8). However, most of the time you'll be rolling one of each of these dice at the same time and adding the result. This is just called the Roll. Often once you've made a Roll, you will need to consult the two dice involved independently as well. For example, some maneuvers will use d6 to determine damage and the d8 to determine which Psyche rating has been hit. Of course neither of those are relevant unless the Roll is high enough to hit.

Maneuvers

Maneuvers are the basic actions of Savagery. Combat is broken down into a series of bouts. At the beginning of a bout, each combatant chooses a fighting style and defensive maneuver from that style. Then in descending order of Ego, the attacking combatants choose an offensive maneuver and attempt to harm the combatant of their choice, or choose not to attack and heal 2 damage to one psyche rating. If two characters are tied in Ego, then use the remaining psyche ratings in order: Empathy, Ideals, Libido, Reason.

The result of each attack is determined by adding any fighting style maneuver bonuses, the offensive maneuver's psyche rating, and any other bonuses to a roll. The defender adds any fighting style maneuver bonuses, the defensive maneuver's psyche rating, and any

other bonuses to 8. If the attacker beats the defender's total then the attack hits and effect is determined by the individual dice in the roll, based on which maneuvers were used. Some defensive maneuvers can also affect the attacker if an attack fails to hit.

The next page is a list of the core maneuvers, separated so that it can be used as a reference sheet.



Taking the Defense

Maneuver List

Defensive Maneuvers

- **Counter** (*Reason*) - You are ready to shoot down whatever anyone says to you. If an attack against you fails, deal the d6 in damage to the Psyche rating of the attacker's offensive maneuver.
- **Deflect** (*Libido*) - You blind yourself to your opponent's position. If an attack against you misses, you gain +2 to defend against that opponent next bout.
- **Evade** (*Empathy*) - By anticipating your opponent you avoid your most vulnerable topics. After defensive maneuvers are chosen, choose one offensive maneuver to get +4 to defend against that maneuver this bout.
- **Guard** (*Ideals*) - By withdrawing you protect yourself from the worst. Reduce damage from successful attacks by 2.

Offensive Maneuvers

- **Beat** (*Ideals*) - You beat aside defenses with the power of your beliefs. If you hit, you get +2 to hit that opponent next bout. **Damage:** the d6, **Location:** the d8 - 1-3 = Ideals, 4-5 = Empathy, 6-7 = Ego, 8 = Reason.
- **Brutalize** (*Empathy*) - You identify your foe's weak points and go right for them. **Damage:** the d8, **Location:** the d6 - 1-3 = Opponent's Lowest Psyche Rating, 4 = Empathy, 5 = Ideals, 6 = Ego.
- **Distract** (*Empathy*) - You change the subject, shifting to unfamiliar ground for your foe. If you hit, you get +2 to defend against that opponent on their

next attack. **Damage:** the d6, **Location:** the d8 - 1-2 = Reason, 3-4 = Empathy, 5 = Ideals, 6-8 = Ego.

- **Dominate** (*Ego*) - You crush others with your force of will. **Damage:** the d8 +2, **Location:** always Ego.
- **Entice** (*Libido*) - You draw your opponent out with suggestiveness. If you hit, your next attack does +4 damage against that opponent. **Damage:** the d8 / 2 (round up), **Location:** the d6 - 1-2 = Reason, 3-4 = Ideals, 5-6 = Ego.
- **Feint** (*Reason*) - You trick your opponent into a flawed defense. Gain +2 to hit this opponent next bout (regardless of the success of this attack). **Damage:** the d6 / 2 (round up), **Location:** the d8 - 1-4 = Ego, 5-6 = Libido, 7 = Empathy, 8 = Reason.
- **Grapple** (*Reason*) - You debate your opponent into a standstill. **Damage:** the d8 +1 for each successful grapple in a row, **Location:** the d6 - 1-2 = Ego, 3-4 = Libido, 5-6 = Empathy.
- **Stifle** (*Ideals*) - You reflect your foe's aggression right back. **Damage:** the d8, **Location:** the d6 - 1-2 = Libido, 3-4 = Empathy, 5-6 = Psyche rating used on opponent's offensive maneuver this bout (or Ego if no offensive maneuver).
- **Strike** (*Libido*) - You lash out at your foe. **Damage:** the d8, **Location:** the d6 - 1-2 = Ego, 3-4 = Ideals, 5-6 = Empathy.

Fighting Styles

At the simplest, fighting styles are ways of interacting with people. Some may seem more pleasant than others, but they share a common goal, to defeat your foes in emotional combat.

The first rating in a fighting style gives access to a group of maneuvers, sometimes including special maneuvers. These maneuvers are listed with modifiers, and those modifiers are based on the rating for that fighting style. Remember, you may only use one fighting style during a bout, although you may freely change between bouts.

Fighting styles also give one additional ability, called assists. These are only used during other player's trigger scenes. You may use each fighting style's assist once per scene to help your fellow club member.

Basher - You are direct and vicious.

Defenses: Deflect, Guard

Signature Attack: Strike at +2

Attacks: Beat, Dominate, Grapple

Assist: Ally deals +2 damage on a successful attack.



Bashing Away

Debater - You prefer to trap your foes in tangles of logic.

Defenses: Counter, Guard

Signature Attack: Grapple at +2

Attacks: Distract, Stifle, Strike

Assist: Add or subtract one from a die used

for location.

Intimidator - You put others in their place.

Defenses: Deflect, Guard

Signature Attack: Beat at +2

Attacks: Brutalize, Dominate, Entice

Assist: Ally gets +2 on an offensive maneuver for a bout.



Intimidation

Listener - You are receptive, allowing you to control the fight.

Defenses: Counter, Evade

Signature Attack: Brutalize at +2

Attacks: Distract, Entice, Feint

Assist: Allow an ally to change defensive maneuver during a bout.

Seducer - You are manipulative and cunning.

Defenses: Deflect, Evade

Signature Attack: Entice at +2

Attacks: Brutalize, Feint, Stifle

Assist: Provide Entice to an ally.



Seducer

Sneak - You are underhanded and tricky.

Defenses: Counter, Evade

Signature Attack: Feint at +2

Attacks: Brutalize, Distract, Strike

Assist: Ally gains benefits of a successful Beat, Distract, Entice, or Grapple, even if the attack misses.

Stalwart - You are calm and difficult to hurt.

Defenses: Evade, Guard

Signature Attack: Stifle at +2

Attacks: Beat, Grapple, Strike

Assist: Reduce the damage dealt to an ally by 2.

Whiner - You have taken complaining to a fine art.

Defenses: Counter, Deflect

Signature Attack: Distract at +2

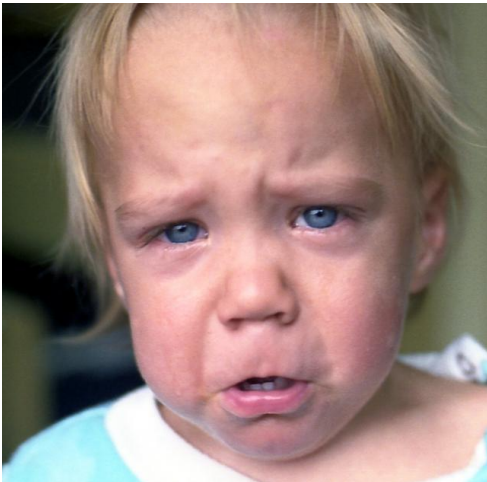
Attacks: Beat, Feint, Stifle

Assist: Ally gains +2 against one attack.

Damage and Stakes

Offensive maneuvers (and Counter) can deal damage to one psyche rating at a time. That rating is determined by the location die and the maneuver. Damage accumulates on a psyche rating until damage equal or more than five times the rating is sustained. Once that happens the psyche rating is broken: its maneuvers cannot be used and it no longer takes damage from maneuvers.

Every scene has a stakes level, which determines how vicious and important this fight is. The stakes levels are:



Shouldn't Have Escalated

1. **Sparring** - fight ends when one participant has one broken psyche rating. A losing club member may choose to escalate to Low Stakes.
2. **Low Stakes** - fight ends when one participant has two broken psyche ratings. If a club member wins increase a Drive by 1, if she loses decrease a Drive by 1. A losing club member may choose to escalate to High Stakes.
3. **High Stakes** - fight ends when one participant has three broken psyche ratings. If a club member wins increase a Drive by 2, if she loses decrease a Drive by 2.

A club scene starts at Sparring, while a trigger scene begins at Low or High Stakes as chosen by the club member in the scene.

After a scene, if your club member has two or more broken psyche ratings reduce all but one of those ratings by one, you choose which. Then remove all damage from psyche ratings. If a psyche rating drops to zero it is injured until it is increased above zero:

- Ego Injury - Causes depression and self-loathing.
- Empathy Injury - Causes disassociation.
- Ideal Injury - Causes anxiety.
- Libido Injury - Causes regression.
- Reason Injury - Causes delusions.

Injured ratings cannot be used in a fight, but also do not take damage. While they act as broken, they do not count for the purposes of ending a fight.



Injury Persists

Moving On

For each point of Drive that increases or decreases from a fight, gain an experience point. What happens when you win, lose, or tap out in a fight is based on exactly that choice. One of the typical benefits among the different styles are Victory Points (VP). You usually gain VP by winning fights, and those VP can be expended to enhance your character.

- 3 XP increases a Psyche Rating by 1, up to 5.
- 4 XP adds a new drive at 1.
- 5 XP learn a new Fighting Style.

Even before creating characters, your group decided on a style of play. Each style of play also comes with an objective, which may or may not end the game. It is suggested that this be an overall group goal.



On Your Way Up

Upward Spiral

If your group chose to play an upwards spiral type of game, then you are having a particularly optimistic game. Psyche ratings are not

reduced after a fight, regardless of how many were broken.

If you want to play for final objective, then the objective is to have every character bring two drives to a rating of seven.

Making a Change

If your group chose to play a horizontal change type of game, you are playing to give up one part of your club member's lives for another. For every two XP you gain you may reduce one drive by one, without costing or giving XP.

If you want to play for a final objective, then the objective is to have every character bring their highest initial drive to zero, and bring two new drives to a rating of at least five.



On Your Way Down

Falling Down

If your group chose to play a downward spiral type of game, then you are looking for outcome of madness and pain. The cost to increase a psyche rating becomes 6 XP and every fight has at least low stakes, including club scenes.

If you want to play for a final objective, then the objective is for each character to have two injured Psyche ratings.

Playing Without a Net

Unlike many RPGs, Savagery doesn't always provide the GM very much to do. Sure he or she can make the antagonists for trigger scenes, and the GM is usually called to referee, but other than that, this game doesn't really require a GM.

Many players are often wary of RPGs which don't have a GM, but if you're willing to take that plunge here's how to do it.

First, decide how your group will resolve conflicts and disagreements. A vote is often a good way, but other approaches exist, such as simply picking an impartial judge for the group, or deciding randomly.

Second, use the following rules to make and play random antagonists:

If this character is mentioned as a detail on a drive, then determine his or her Psyche ratings by a $d8 / 2 + 1$ (round up). If not then determine them by a $d6 / 2 + 1$ (round up). Random antagonists get only the following two maneuvers, and use them each bout.

- **Defend** (*Second Highest Psyche Rating*) - Only Random Antagonists can use this maneuver. Gain a +1 defense bonus, and reduce all damage by 1.
- **Attack** (*Highest Psyche Rating*) - Only Random Antagonists can use this maneuver. Evade only gives a +1 bonus verses this maneuver. **Damage:** the $d8 + 1$, **Location:** the $d6 - 1-2 =$ Ego, 3 = Reason, 4 = Empathy, 5 = Libido, 6 = Ideals.

Third, triggers should be activated for each player character in turn, with a chance for a club scene in between. This can be done by putting each character's name on a piece of paper and drawing these papers one at a time, until they have all been drawn. When a character is picked, that player chooses which drive is triggered. Then the player describes the scene, any new antagonists needed can be created using the above method so that combat can begin.

The Good Fight

Chandra Micheals is a computer repair tech at a law firm. Recently she has joined a Women's Rifle Club, to try to become more assertive. Of course the first place she needs to assert control is at her job.

This is Chandra.

Name: Chandra Micheals

Club: Women's Rifle Club

Past: When she was growing up, Chandra always wanted to be a writer.

Present: She repairs computers at the Law Firm of Gary, Abel, and Fine.

Future: What she wants more than anything right now is a stable relationship.

Psyche:

Ego - 2

Empathy - 4

Ideals - 2

Libido - 3

Reason - 3

Drives:

Love Life 3

Ex-Boyfriend, Roses, Ex-Girlfriend

Must See TV 1

Survivor, Carol (roommate), Big Screen TV

Keep Your Job 5

Cubicle, Danny (boss), Broken Computers

Fighting Styles:

Debater, Listener

And this is her boss.

Danny

Psyche:

Ego - 4

Empathy - 3

Ideals - 3

Libido - 2

Reason - 2

Fighting Styles:

Basher, Intimidator

Now lets see them fight.

In setting the scene Chandra's player says that Danny is coming to yell at Chandra for another broken machine. It's not her fault, but he doesn't really care. This scene is for Low Stakes, lasting until one person has two broken psyche ratings.

First Bout

Danny chooses his defense as Deflect (using his Intimidator style). This gives him a total defense of 8 (base) + 2 (his Libido) = 10. Chandra chooses Counter (using her Debater style) as her defense giving her 8 (base) + 3 (her Reason) = 11.

Danny gets first crack and chooses to use his special Dominate maneuver. His total bonuses are just 4, from his Ego. Since he's an antagonist, the GM rolls for him and gets a 6. This gives him a 10, not enough to beat Chandra's defense. Since Chandra chose to Counter, Danny takes damage to his Ego equal to the d6 rolled, in this case 4.

Chandra then decides, using her Debator fighting style, to press Danny after her successful counter. She wants to further attack his oversized Ego and chooses to Stifle him. This attack uses her Ideals a bonus of 3. She then rolls a 7, which is just enough to hit his defense of 10. Her d6 is a 2, meaning she instead hits his Libido, deflating his passion for this fight by damage equal to the d8 which rolled a 5.

Second Bout

Danny chooses his defense as Deflect once again. This gives him a total defense of 10 once again. Chandra chooses Evade (using her Listener style) as her defense giving her 8 (base) + 4 (her Empathy) = 16, she chooses

Dominant as the offensive maneuver to protect against, giving her a 16 defense against that maneuver, or a 12 defense against any other maneuver.

Danny goes first again and chooses to use the Intimidator's signature maneuver, Beat. His total bonuses are 3 (his Ideals) + 2 (from his style) = 5. The GM rolls for him and gets an 11. This gives him a 16, beating Chandra's defense. His d6 was a 3, and his d8 was an 8, so he inflicts 3 damage on Chandra's reason as she tries to grasp what he could possibly be thinking.

Chandra then chooses to use the Brutalize

signature maneuver of the Listener, striking back at Danny's sore spots. Her bonuses are 4 (her Empathy) + 2 (from her style) = 6. Her player then rolls a 13. This easily hits Danny. Since she rolled a 6 on the d6 and a 7 on the d8, she deals another 7 damage to Danny's Ego.

At the end of this bout, Chandra has taken 3 wounds on her Reason, but Danny has taken a total of 11 wounds to his Ego and 5 to his Libido. That leaves both of those ratings at half or more damage to break them. But considering his attack next bout will be getting a +2, Chandra may still be in for some trouble.